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SUBJECT: LABOR TRAFFICKING VICTIMS RESCUED IN DIEGO SUAREZ

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¶1. SUMMARY: Embassy Antananarivo's reporting on trafficking in persons (TIP) has tended to focus on the conspicuous sex trafficking of minors in tourism hotspots along Madagascar's coast, namely on the island of Nosy Be (reftel). While the same kind of sexual exploitation exists in the northern coastal city of Diego Suarez, its location on the mainland also facilitates labor trafficking -- perhaps a more ubiquitous problem in poverty-ridden Madagascar. PolOff and G/TIP visitor Amy LeMar recently visited a G/TIP-funded multi-sector child protection network put in place by UNICEF in Diego Suarez. The program is achieving small victories in handling the cases of local trafficking victims from the initial complaint through prosecution, including medical assistance and psychosocial services for victims. This cable tells the stories of Hortense and Lydia, two labor trafficking victims assisted by the network in Diego Suarez. END SUMMARY.

HOW THE NETWORK WORKS

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¶2. Established in 2003, the multi-sector child protection network (CMDPE) of Diego Suarez brings together over 30 local entities to address child exploitation issues, including government representatives, medical providers, police, judges, public prosecutors, child leaders, labor inspectors, social workers, NGO leaders, ILO representatives, teachers and animators. In addition to conducting numerous awareness-raising activities, once a case is brought to the network's attention the relevant members mobilize to conduct a local investigation, provide the victim with medical and psychosocial care, present the case before a judge, and locate the victim's family. In 2006, the network received 203 complaints of severe physical abuse, abandonment, rape, corruption of a minor, and psycho/physical abuse and exploitation. Fifty-three cases were treated and 50 of those are currently being followed up.

HORTENSE: TRAFFICKED TO TRAVELLING VENDORS

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¶3. Accompanied by CMDPE leaders and social workers, PolOff and LeMar met with 11-year-old Hortense, a labor trafficking victim rescued by the network. Her story started one year ago in a village in northeastern Madagascar. A traveling vendor befriended Hortense's older brother and, feigning sympathy for the girl, offered to take her to a local town and put her in school. For months Hortense moved from village to village helping the vendor sell used clothing, sleeping on the floor, barely eating, and hiding on the floors of vehicles to avoid being spotted by police at checkpoints -- but not once stepping foot inside a school. Despite her family's efforts to follow the vendor from village to village and demand that Hortense be sent to school, they soon lost track and gave her up for dead.

Once the traveling market had moved to Diego Suarez, Hortense managed to contact a neighbor, who helped her get in touch with Patricia, a local CMPDE member. When asked how she knew about Patricia, Hortense responded, "All the kids with problems around here know Patricia takes care of children." Patricia raised the case with the CMPDE, who alerted local leaders, judges, and police. The vendor had fled by this point, but the network was able to have Patricia granted temporary custody, locate Hortense's relatives in the area and make plans to send Hortense back to her family in a matter of weeks.

LYDIA: THE CHALLENGE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

14. PolOff and LeMar also attended a wide-ranging awareness-raising session in Ambondromifehy, a village in the bush several hours outside of Diego Suarez, where one of the main themes was, "Don't sell your children." While the majority of the 300 parents assembled in the village square nodded their heads in agreement, several expressed quite frankly one cannot condemn parents for trying to sell their children into a better life if they are suffering at home. In a village where money and jobs are scarce and most of the 2,000 children cannot afford to attend school, what other choice do parents have? PolOff and LeMar subsequently met with Lydia, a 14-year-old girl whose parents had sold her to a distant relative believing she would have a better life working as a domestic servant in Diego Suarez. Network members managed to rescue Lydia from the family that was physically abusing her, have the head of the family imprisoned for several days, and return Lydia to her village.

15. COMMENT: This program visit was extremely helpful in assessing the progress of Department-funded anti-trafficking programs and encouraging implementing partners. The multi-sector child

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protection network in Diego Suarez is clearly starting to fill the gaps in victim protection and prosecution and serves as a model for the 14-plus networks UNICEF is setting up around the country. While Hortense and Lydia are success stories, the network clearly faces an uphill battle in a place where people have few economic alternatives. Post appreciates G/TIP's support in combating trafficking in Madagascar and hopes for continued Department support for other TIP programs in the future. END COMMENT.

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